

Testimony of Eileen M. Russo
Naugatuck Resident

***H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

*February 23, 2017
Appropriations Subcommittee on Health Public Hearing
Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, Regional Action Council Funding*

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Senator Markley, Representative Dillon and members of the Appropriations Subcommittee:

My name is Eileen Russo and I am a resident of Naugatuck. In the interest of full disclosure I serve (in a volunteer capacity) on the Steering Committee of Central Naugatuck Valley Regional Action Council (CNVRAC), teach for Gateway Community College, and have been employed in the private non-profit sector for much of my career in addiction treatment settings. This written testimony is to strongly oppose the grave cuts to regional action councils that will decimate the current prevention network structure.

Once again as in previous years, the DMHAS portion of the budget includes the following: "Consolidate Substance Abuse and Mental Health Advocacy Organizations" for a savings of 1.205 million. For all 13 RACs and the 5 mental health boards, the total remaining funding in this area is \$300,000. This is approximately \$16,600 per RAC, and does not constitute consolidation. This is **complete elimination** of the Regional Action Councils in our state.

In 2015, I submitted testimony that stated: "In light of the tragic shooting in Sandy Hook and the resulting recommendation from the Sandy Hook Commission that the state needs more early identification, prevention, and treatment efforts, it is penny wise and pound foolish to cut the limited prevention efforts that the State of Connecticut has in place. A key recommendation from the Sandy Hook Commission is widespread training in Mental Health First Aid. The proposed budget cut would essentially eliminate the ability of the Regional Action Councils to provide this training.

In addition to the reduction in services such as Mental Health First Aid, the Regional Action Councils provided much needed services at the local level. Some examples of what has

been provided to Naugatuck citizens (without any financial contribution from the Borough) during the past two years alone are:

- Promotion & coordination of a comprehensive youth risk behavior and resiliency survey conducted with all students in grades 7-12 throughout Naugatuck Public Schools
- Promotion & coordination of a district-wide youth-led analysis of local-level risk and protective factors affecting adolescent substance use, education, risk of suicide, bullying, safety, and other areas affecting health and wellness of young people
- Provided Grant Application technical assistance and oversight to Naugatuck Youth Services, the designated Local Substance Abuse Prevention Council, their Board of Directors, and collaborating agencies
- Coordination and development of local-level Drug Endangered Child (DEC) Alliance between Naugatuck Police Department, Department of Children & Families, and the statewide DEC office
- Promotion & Coordination of DEC training for Naugatuck Law Enforcement, School Administration and Pupil Services Staff, area social service agencies, probation, parole, DCF Caseworkers, and other related professionals
- Coordination of permanent Medication Drop Box installation at Naugatuck Police Department; ongoing promotion of this cost-effective opioid deterrence measure
- Sub-regional and local training delivery: 40 Developmental Assets for Youth; Opioid Abuse Prevention Forum; Financial Wellness for Seniors and Problem Gambling Prevention Across the Lifespan; Local Prevention Council “101”; Local Prevention Council Capacity Building; Local Prevention Council TA: Prevention Strategies & Effective Service Delivery.”

Since my original testimony, the Regional Action Councils have taken a lead in assisting towns and cities across Connecticut in understanding and fighting the opioid epidemic. Activities have included organizing and facilitating “town hall” meetings, providing information and training on the use of NARCAN, responding to the grief of families whose children have died as a result of an overdose, and answering a multitude of questions from lawmakers, first responders and community members.

In my introduction I mentioned that I have worked in mental health/addiction treatment for much of my career. I have seen first-hand that treatment can bring miracles to the lives of those who suffer from addiction/mental health problems. However, I also know that treatment is much more expensive than prevention and without prevention or treatment; the state can look forward to incarcerating those with problems at a cost of approximately \$44,000 per inmate, per year.

In closing, I again urge you to **OPPOSE the proposed budget consolidation under H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING**

JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR that would essentially decimate the Connecticut Prevention Network and the Regional Action Councils. This would result not only in a loss of the services provided by the Regional Action Councils, but would essentially eliminate any potential long-term benefit to the state in later environmental, treatment, and other healthcare cost savings as well.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Eileen M. Russo,

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